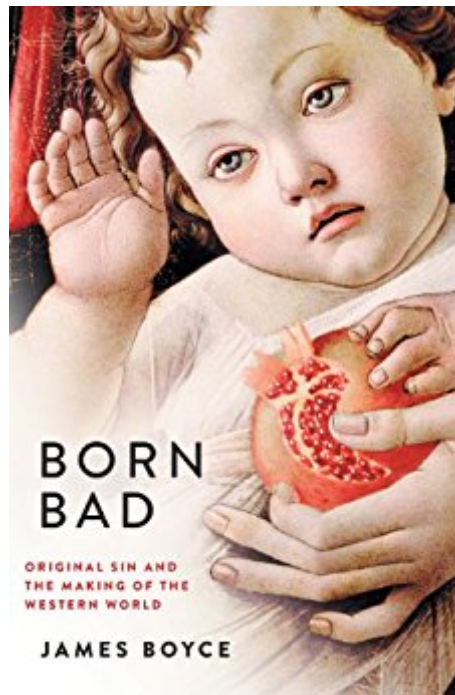




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# **Born Bad: Original Sin And The Making Of The Western World**



## Synopsis

Original sin is the Western world's creation story. According to the doctrine of original sin, humans are born bad and only God's grace can bring salvation. In this captivating book, acclaimed historian James Boyce shows how these ideas have shaped the Western view of human nature right up to the present. The legacy of original sin takes many forms, including the distinctive discontent of Western people – the feelings of guilt and inadequacy associated not with doing wrong, but with being wrong. As well as an innovative history of Christianity, Boyce offers new insights into the making of the West. Born Bad traces a fascinating journey from Adam and Eve all the way to Adam Smith and Richard Dawkins in this sweeping story of a controversial idea and its remarkable influence. “What is wrong with me? This question has haunted the West for fifteen hundred years, but until recently it came with an answer – which was called original sin. Western people believed they were ‘born bad’ because they had inherited the sin of the first humans.” James Boyce – “This highly original, readable book shows how the Christian idea that we are all somehow fundamentally warped has helped to shape democratic politics, free markets, sexual anxieties and even debates about whether dead babies go to heaven.” Marion Maddox, author of *God Under Howard* and *Taking God to School* – “An imaginative and utterly unpredictable book. Alleluia.” Australian – “Boyce finds fascinating marks of the idea of original sin in the big liberal ideas of free-market economics, Darwinian evolution and psychological analysis, but no compensating marks equivalent to the Christian idea of sanctifying grace.” Monthly – “James Boyce is the best kind of historian of ideas. He does not reduce the complexity of his subject to a few easy lessons. He opens up the history of the idea of original sin rather than narrowing it down.” [Here] is an unblinking regard for the efforts the human race has made to understand itself.” Age – “It is a treat for the reader that a subject as bold, intricate and dense as original sin has been examined by the eloquent James Boyce. In his hands, what may seem a terrifying subject is thoroughly examined and put through its historical, theological and psychological paces.” Mercury – “This is a fascinating revisionist account of modernity... The book is clear, elegantly written, beautifully paced and encourages rich reflection.” – “Andrew Hamilton, *Eureka Street* – “This is an exceptional, highly recommended work, innovative and creative in surprising ways.” Publishers Weekly, starred review – “James Boyce has.... written a brilliant and exhilarating work of people scholarship. I pencil vertical lines in the margins of the books I read whenever a sentence or paragraph seems especially striking. My copy of *Born Bad* carries such

scribbles of every other page. •Michael Dirda, Washington PostJames Boyce is the multiple award-winning author of Born Bad, 1835 and Van Diemen's Land. He has a PhD from the University of Tasmania, where he is an honorary research associate of the School of Geography and Environmental Studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a fresh and hugely intelligent overview of the origins and effect of the western Christian doctrine of "Original Sin". The author shows how this belief emerged, against considerable opposition, and how it has played out in western Christian history. He shows how in more recent times Christians have tended to disown this doctrine; but for me the really original and interesting part of the book is his exposition of how the doctrine continues to be re-imagined and to find new life today in non-religious thought-forms, in other words, how it continues to permeate our whole sense of who we (in the west) are. The book is written in a non-opinionated, non-shouty style, and the author seems able to understand and sympathize with motivations behind beliefs that he does not himself share...i.e, he writes with wisdom and respect. I found this a beautiful, insightful and hugely enjoyable book, a real page-turner.

Admittedly, I read this book a few months ago on my Kindle, and have read many since then, so it is not exactly fresh in my mind as to the specifics. I received an email from asking me to review it, resurrecting some vague memories of it. I am not remotely a theologian ( immersed in medical literature for the most part, due to my work), so I cannot make a true, educated theological critique of the book. I will say that it was extremely thought- provoking and did make me desire to do more research on the topic. I was raised in the church ( my father was a pastor), so I am not entirely ignorant of the basics of what he states in this book. I did feel like much of what he proposes as his basic thesis ( that we indeed are not under Adam's curse, in the form of original sin), did resonate with my own personal experience growing up ( always feeling inherently flawed for no reason...) I was a very compliant, well-behaved child/teenager etc, yet always felt guilt. This feeling followed me into my adult years and as a young wife and mother, in spite of trying so hard to be morally and in every other way, perfect. There were other issues in my upbringing that could have also accounted for this perpetual quest for perfection, to be sure, but as I read this book, I had so many "aha" moments as I related some of my experience to his well-written explanations and historical documentation as to the evolution of this belief. I also was very interested to read that the great Christian writer/apologist, CS Lewis didn't not espouse a belief in original sin. Again, I do intend to research this more fully and to get his book in hard copy, but for the most part, I really was intrigued with what he wrote and did read the book on one rainy Saturday ( couldn't put it down). I would recommend it to anyone curious about this topic.

It was a well prepared book of the thoughts and ideas of the early interpreters and policy makers of the bible. The author was very fair and objective, showing all sides of any controversy. This is an excellent book. If you enjoy history, you will love this book.

Deep insights into why so many think they are doomed by the creator. Marvelous writing and story telling yet documented social and religious history. Welcomed and all need to read it. Changed my understanding of Christianity.

Much more academic than I expected. Heavy read but interesting. I couldn't get through all of it.

Interesting book. Great price.

Excellent historical explanation of the original sin concept.

Several epigrams about the nature of history come to mind when I consider this excellent volume: "The more things change the more they stay the same" is one; another is "What goes round comes round." James Boyce has taken a seemingly old-fashioned idea from a less-than-popular public field (theology) and made it not only comprehensible and relevant (related to us here and now) but also engaging and downright interesting. Anyone who has studied the history of theology is aware that there is little new under that sun; as a friend of mind once said, "We haven't been able to invent theologies that weren't known two thousand years ago by the early Christians." Well, Boyce argues a bit with that, but it is fascinating how sophisticated "modern" culture replicates so closely the ideological warfare of the first centuries of Christianity's life. But more than that, we are so arrogant in our cleverness that we fall into intellectual traps without being aware that we're caught like a bug in a venus flytrap. Stephen Hawkings ends up agreeing with St. Augustine, the creator and developer of the doctrine of original sin, and secularists assume the same attitude about human nature as Augustine without being aware of how "theistic" they are being. We might be happy to join them in their skepticism if it weren't for the hopelessness implicit in their world view. If they think humanity all on its own can bring about the golden age some of them like to envision, they are blind to the same capacity for depravity of which they accuse theists throughout history. The difference between Augustine and Hawkings is that the saint proffers redemption without placing the burden for it on a humanity that is unqualified to bring it about while our most popular contemporary skeptics abandon us to a universe that is just as brutal in some ways as Augustine's with no potential for escape from its harsh potentialities. This is an excellent study not only of theology but of the emptiness of much of contemporary intellectualism.

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